LETTERS AS LITERATURE

November – December, 1978

Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library
THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

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An Exhibition at the
Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library
University of Toronto
November - December 1978

On the occasion of the Fourteenth Annual Conference on
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It is only comparatively recently that the correspondence of literary figures has come to be appreciated both as literature in its own right and as valuable background material for a study of a writer's work. Literary letters considered in this context are quite distinct from the epistles used as a literary genre by some eighteenth century English novelists. They are also to be distinguished from the "letters" used by writers like Erasmus to serve as introductions, dedications, and apologia to their own published works. Horace Walpole is perhaps the best example of a writer consciously using the informal personal letter as a literary form, ultimately meant, it seems clear, for publication. His correspondence is now at last edited and presented to the world by Wilmarth Lewis and the Yale University Press.

The letters included in this exhibition are mostly informal in style although they often reflect the formal writing style of their authors. Some of them have been included in published collections of letters; one or two might properly belong in the editions displayed but were missed by the editors; and some await editing and publication.

CASE 1

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU (1712-1778)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's extensive correspondence has generated so much interest that in this century alone it has been collected and critically edited twice. Théophile Dufour's edition began in 1924 with Volume 1 and ends in 1934 with volume 20. Ralph A. Leigh's edition extends to 27 volumes published between 1965 and 1977. Volumes from both editions are included in this case along with the original Rousseau letters. Also shown is the 1915 edition of the collected letters of Madame Roland (1754-1793), a disciple of Rousseau's, and the original letter she wrote upon hearing of his death, just over two hundred years ago.

Books

1. Correspondence complète de Jean Jacques Rousseau. Edition critique, établie et annotée par R.A. Leigh. Tome IV, 1756-1757, and Tome XIII, juin - décembre 1761. Genève, Institut et Musée Voltaire, Les Délices, 1967-1969.

2. Correspondence générale de J.-J. Rousseau. Collationnée sur les originaux annotée et commentée par Théophile Dufour. Tome septième. Paris, Librairie A. Colin, 1927.

3. Lettres de Madame Roland publiées par Claude Perroud. Nouvelle série, 1747-1780. Tome second. Paris, Imprimerie National, 1915.

Letters

4. Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Paul-Claude Moultou [Geneva] Montmorenci, Xbr [i.e. Dec.] 23, 1761.

> C'en fait, cher Moultou, nous ne nous reverrons plus que dans le séjour des justes.

This letter appears both in Dufour, vol. 7, p. 3, and in Leigh, vol. 9, p. 341.

5. Jean-Jacques Rousseau to [Toussaint-Pierre] Lenieps, Paris. L'hermitage [France] 5 7bre [i.e. Sept.] 1756.

> Voulez-vous bien, mon ami, vous charger d'une commission que je ne puis donner à personne qui aime mieux à servir ses Amis, et dont j'aime mieux à recevoir des service que vous.

6. [Marie Jeanne (Phlipon) Roland de la Platière] to Henriette [Cannet, Amiens. Paris] 7 [i.e. 6] - 10 juillet, 1778.

> Jean-Jacques est mort; cette nouvelle me fut annoncé hier à dîner.

CASE 2

"ENGLISH BARDS AND SCOTCH REVIEWERS"

David Moir (1798-1851) was a Scottish physician with a busy practice in Musselburgh who became a well known literary figure of his time, contributing to Blackwood's and other literary journals under the pseudonym of Delta. In the letters displayed, written to Alexander Balfour of Blackwood's, Moir reveals a severely critical and moral response to the writings of Lord Byron and his circle. Byron already had satirized just such an attitude in his English Bards and Scotch Reviewers of 1809, but the criticism had by no means abated when The Liberal, a miscellany containing works by Hunt, Southey, and Byron, appeared in 1822. In a letter written the following year Moir describes the publication as "scurrilous, irreligious, and shabby beyond compare".

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Books

1. The Liberal; verse and prose from the South. London, Printed by and for J. Hunt, 1822-23.

Letters

2. David M. Moir to [Alexander] Balfour [Edinburgh. Musselburgh] April 2 [1822]

   Dear Sir, - With this I send you the last No. of Blackwoods, which contains several very good papers.

3. David M. Moir to [Alexander] Balfour [Edinburgh. Musselburgh] July 22 [1822]

   Dear Sir, - With this I send you Lord Byron's Tragedies which notwithstanding their occasional poetical power are by no means favourites of mine.

4. David M. Moir to [Alexander] Balfour [Edinburgh. Musselburgh] Oct. 27 [1823?]

   Dear Sir, - With this I return the Caledonian, which is a very respectable and well-written work.

5. David M. Moir to [Alexander] Balfour [Edinburgh. Musselburgh, 1825?]

   My dear Sir, - I return the Anecdotes of Byron, which I have looked over with considerable [interest], though few of them are new to me.

CASE 3

THOMAS CARLYLE (1795-1881)

Thomas Carlyle began writing individual letters to his youngest sister, Jenny (Janet), in 1832 when she was about 19 and he was 37, and continued this correspondence, with the help of a niece in his last years, until 1875, six years before his death. Janet Carlyle married Robert Hanning, an old family friend, at Scotsbrig on March 15, 1836 and then moved to Manchester. In 1851, with her two daughters, she left for Canada to join her husband who had already settled in Hamilton, Ontario. The entire sequence of letters, which gives much information about Carlyle's family and reveals the great affection and admiration which he felt for his mother in particular, was edited and published by C.T. Copeland in 1899.

Books

1. Letters of Thomas Carlyle to his youngest sister. Edited with an introductory essay by Charles Townshend Copeland. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 1899.

Letters

2. Thomas Carlyle to [Janet] Carlyle, Scotland. London, January 23, 1832.

   My dear Jenny, - Will you put up with the smallest of letters rather than with none at all?

3. Thomas Carlyle to [Janet Carlyle] Hanning, Manchester. London, May 16, 1836.

   My dear Jenny, - Your letter has been here several weeks, a very welcome messenger to us, and I did not think at the time I should have been so long in answering it.

4. Thomas Carlyle to [Janet Carlyle] Hanning, Hamilton, C[anada] W[est] London, April 8, 1855.

   Dear Sister, - I know not if you ever saw our lamented Mother's portrait which was done at Dumfries a good many years ago.

CASE 4

LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS (1870-1945)

One of the most clearly recognized academic uses of letters, apart from whatever general literary merit they might possess, is the information they can provide concerning the composition and publication of specific books. Thus Lord Alfred Douglas, writing to John Lane in 1893 about the publication of the English translation of Oscar Wilde's Salomé, provides important evidence about the translation. Was Mr. Lane's reluctance to publish Douglas's name as the translator (cf. letter of Nov. 8th, 1893) really based on certain knowledge that Aubrey Beardsley had done "the bulk of the translation" or did he have other reasons for excluding Douglas? In any event, Douglas is recognized as the translator in the "Dedication" to the 1894 and 1912 editions but his name does not actually appear on the title page until 1938. The letters exchanged between Douglas and Lane on this subject and displayed here, have not yet been published.

Books

1. Oscar Wilde. Salomé. Drame en un acte. Paris, Librairie de l'Art Independant; Londres, E. Mathews et J. Lane, 1893.

2. Salomé, a tragedy in one act. Translated from the French of Oscar Wilde, with sixteen drawings by Aubrey Beardsley. London, J. Lane, 1912.

3. Salomé. A tragedy in one act. Translated from the French of Oscar Wilde by Lord Alfred Douglas and illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley. With a new introduction by Holbrook Jackson. London, Printed for the Members of The Limited Editions Club, 1938.

4. De Profundis; being the first complete and accurate version of "Epistola: in Carcere et Vinculis", the last prose work in English of Oscar Wilde. With an introduction by Vyvyan Holland. London, Methuen, 1949.

   In this work, written while in prison and cast in the form of a letter to Lord Alfred Douglas, Wilde makes public his disappointment with Douglas's English translation of Salomé: "We had, not unnaturally indeed, differed on the question of the artistic value of your translation of Salomé. So you contented yourself with sending me foolish letters on the subject." (p. 16)

Letters

5. [Lord] Alfred Douglas to [John] Lane [London. London, 1893]

   Dear Mr. Lane, - I am correcting the proofs myself now.

   Not dated. Written in pencil.

6. [Lord] Alfred Douglas to [John] Lane [London] London, Nov. 8, 1893.

   Dear Mr. Lane, - I have been informed, that you give it as <u>one</u> of your reasons for your reluctance to have my name on the cover of Salomé, that the "bulk of the translation was really done by Aubrey Beardsley."

7. [Lord] Alfred Douglas to [John] Lane [London. London] Nov. 9, 1893.

   Dear Mr. Lane, - I am obliged to you for your letter.

8. [Lord] Alfred Douglas to [John] Lane [London] Cairo, Dec. 8, 1893.

   Dear Mr. Lane, - Will you kindly let me know when Salomé is going to be brought out?

CASE 5

MAX BEERBOHM (1872-1956)

The letters of an artist can contain unexpected bonuses. Max Beerbohm, writing to Reggie Turner in 1892, includes a self-portrait, unrecorded in Sir Rupert Hart-Davis' comprehensive catalogue, and the letter itself, also not included in the published collection, is one of Max's most sprightly undergraduate epistles. His letter to the graphologist is also amusing but the handwriting something of a contrast to the earlier letter. Max's letter to The Bookman's Journal, probably written in the 1920's, contains a typical Maxian reference to an earlier literary piece: "... a quarter of a century ago I wrote an essay about George IV. But I haven't been thinking about him ever since. Heartless as it may seem to you, I have hardly given him a thought from that day to this."

Books

1. Max Beerbohm: Letters to Reggie Turner. Edited by Rupert Hart-Davis. London, 1964.

2. Max Beerbohm's letters to Reggie Turner. Edited by Rupert Hart-Davis. Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott, 1965.

Letters

3. Max Beerbohm to [Reggie] Turner [London] Oxford [1892]

> My dear Turner, - So glad you like the Lord Arthur Savile and have got tickets for the first night.

This letter is accompanied by an original self-caricature entitled "Max Beerbohm. By Himself. 1892"

4. Max Beerbohm to the Editor, The Bookman's Journal [London] Rapallo, Italy [n.d.]

> Sir, - I was rather puzzled by your idea that my "views" on A.G.B.'s account of the circumstances in which the nation acquired George III's books from George IV "should make interesting reading".

Added to this letter are holograph instructions to the Printer regarding the letter's correct punctuation.

5. Max Beerbohm to [Ada] Leverson [London. London, n.d.]

> My dear Mrs. Leverson, - I do so wish I could fix a day; but alas I mustn't.

6. Max Beerbohm to [Ada] Leverson [London. London, n.d.]

> My dear Ada, - I cannot, unluckily, come today or tomorrow.

7. Max Beerbohm to [a graphologist. London] Nov. 21, 1898.

> Dear Sir, - I have much pleasure in sending to you some of the hand-writing for which you ask, and I shall look forward to your delineation.

CASE 6

FIONA MACLEOD (WILLIAM SHARP, 1855-1905)

The Scottish writer William Sharp sometimes published under the name of Fiona Macleod whom he said was his cousin. He carried the pretense so far as to have her write and sign her own letters to her publishers, and have her autograph her own books, in a style and hand quite different from his own.

Books

1. Parais. A romance of the Isles. By Fiona Macleod. Derby, Printed by Harpur and Murray and sold by F. Murray, 1894.

   Large Paper Edition
   No. 37/75
   Signed: Fiona Macleod

2. The Mountain Lovers. By Fiona Macleod. London, J. Lane, 1895.

3. From the Hills of Dream. Mountain Songs and Island Runes. By Fiona Macleod. Edinburgh, P. Geddes [1896]

4. From the Hills of Dream. Threnodies, songs and other poems. By Fiona Macleod. Portland, Me., T.B. Mosher, 1901.

Letters

5. William Sharp to [John] Lane [London. Edinburgh, 1894]

> My dear Lane, - I take the opportunity of sending you my new home address to say that I wish you would answer my cousin, Miss M.F. Macleod, about the book she has proposed to you.

6. Fiona Macleod to [John Lane, London] Iona [1894]

My dear Sir, - Mr. William Sharp wrote to me from Edinburgh with your message.

7. William Sharp to [John] Lane [London] Edinburgh, August 16 [18]94.

My dear Lane, - On reaching the above address yesterday from the West Highlands (whither I return - to Iona first - at the end of next week) I found your letter, forwarded from London after some delay there on account of you having addressed it to "Crescent Gardens" instead of Greencroft Gardens.

8. Fiona Macleod to [Katharine] Hinkson [London] Edinburgh, March 3 [18]97.

Dear Mrs. Hinkson, - The Reissue of my shorter tales has brought me so many letters: then my present visit to Edinburgh is a brief one: and, once more, very uncertain health has been like a foe knocking at my gates: for all which triple reason[s] I beg you to forgive me for not having sooner acknowledged your kind little note.

CASE 7

RUPERT BROOKE (1887-1915)

During the year 1913-1914 when he was about twenty-five years old, Rupert Brooke made a tour of North America and the South Seas to recover from a period of emotional stress. Part of his journey took him to Canada and to Ottawa where he met Duncan Campbell Scott, whom he later described as "the only poet in Canada." The letters and photographs displayed in this exhibition document the resulting friendship between the two poets. After Brooke's untimely death in 1916, John Masefield wrote to Scott, "... you are quite right in what you say of him. I loved him, like everybody who knew him, but I always feared that he would die young ..."

Books

1. The Letters of Rupert Brooke. Chosen and edited by Geoffrey Keynes. London, Faber and Faber, 1968.

2. The Letters of Rupert Brooke. Chosen and edited by Geoffrey Keynes. New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968.

Letters

3. Rupert Brooke to [Duncan Campbell] Scott [Ottawa] Toronto, July 23 [1913]

> Dear Scott, - (Dropping the Mr. is to be interpreted not as a mark of irreverence but rather as a recognition of the Brotherhood of Poets - it is nicer, isn't it?)

4. Rupert Brooke to [Duncan Campbell] Scott [Ottawa] Calgary, August 15 [1913]

> Dear Scott, - It came upon me slowly and awfully that I may not have acknowledged those photographs.

5. John Masefield to [Duncan Campbell] Scott [Ottawa] "In the train, going to Erie", February 24, 1916.

> Dear Mr. Scott, - So many thanks for your very kind, charming welcome letter: But how sad not to see you, having got so near.

CASE 8

LETTERS IN EXILE

THOMAS MANN (1875-1955)

Forced to leave Germany with the rise of the National Socialist Party, Thomas Mann and his family first fled to Switzerland and then to the United States where he took out citizenship. From California in 1947 Mann wrote at length to the University of Toronto German scholar, Barker Fairley, commenting on Fairley's recent book on Goethe and referring to Mann's own view of Goethe as expressed in his novel Lotte in Weimar.

Books

1. A Study of Goethe. By Barker Fairley. Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, 1947.

Letters

2. Thomas Mann to Barker Fairley. Pacific Palisades, Calif., December 1, 1947.

> Werter Herr Professor. - Oxford University Press war so freundlich mir Ihr Buch "A Study of Goethe" zu schicken, vielleicht auf Ihren Wink, vielleicht aus eigenem Antrieb.

[Worthy Professor. Oxford University Press was so kind as to send me your book "A Study of Goethe", maybe at your request, maybe on their own initiative]

JOSEF ŠKVORECKÝ (b. 1924)

Škvorecký left Czechoslovakia late in 1968, and, after a year at Berkeley, was offered the position of "writer-in-residence" at the University of Toronto. During his first years in the United States and Canada he tried to find a publisher for his work Tankovy prapor, which had been banned before publication in his native land. No publisher was willing to take a chance on a relatively unknown Czechoslovakian author, however, and Zdena and Josef Škvorecký decided to publish the book themselves, settingup "68 Publishers" to do so. The book sold so well that the Škvoreckýs decided there was a need in the western world for a publisher of Czech and Slovak material aimed at the emigré market. Samoţerbuch is "68 Publishers" fiftieth item and is the Škvoreckýs' way of thanking their readers for their past support. The letters on display reflect the enthusiastic response to their first venture, Tankovy prapor, which encouraged the Škvoreckýs to establish "68 Publishers" on a permanent basis.

Books

3. Tankovy prapor. By Josef Škvorecký. 1st edition. Toronto, 68 Publishers, 1971.

   Also shown is the 2nd edition, November 1972 and the 3rd, June 1973.

4. Samoţerbuch. By Zdena and Josef Škvorecký. Toronto, 68 Publishers, 1977.

Letters

5. Jiři Štajdl to Josef Škvorecký. Munich, West Germany, November 7 [1971?]

   Díky! Už dlouho jsem se tak nesmál!

   [Many thanks! I haven't laughed so much for a long time!]

6. Unidentified radio listener in Czechoslovakia to a western radio station.

   Velmi oceňujeme také referáty o kulturní aktivitě našich posrpnových emigrantů a o knihách nakladatelství, zejména Skvoreckého Publishers 68.

   [We greatly appreciate such references to the cultural activities of our post-September [1968] emigrants and their published works, especially Škvorecký's 68 Publishers]

7. [?] Premek to Josef Škvorecký.

Mily Pepe! Tak konečně Tankovy prapor došel.

[Dear Pepe! Well at last Tankovy prapor has arrived]

8. Jiři Klobouk to Zdena Škvorecká. Ottawa, Ont., January 16, 1972.

Vašemu soudruhu choti vyřid'te, že jeho dílo Tankový prapor bylo čteno každý den po půlnoci ... nahlas ... Moje žena se mnou odmítla spát, pokud jí alespoň kousek nepřečtu.

[Please convey to your esteemed husband, that his book Tankovy prapor was read aloud every night until after midnight ... My wife refused to sleep until I had read her at least a little bit]

Richard G. Landon

Mary Garvie Yohn

November 1, 1978